

In Touch

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE AMERICAN FRIENDS OF THE
JEWISH MUSEUM HOHENEMS, INC.

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Letter from the President

CLAUDE A. ROLLIN, ESQ.

Dear Friends and Supporters of AFJMH:

Since I last wrote to you in our previous Newsletter, winds of change have been sweeping through both the Jewish Museum in Hohenems and our own organization, whose singular purpose is to champion and sustain the Museum's important work.

With respect to our organization, it is with profound sadness that I must report the recent passing of **Uri Taenzer**, our beloved Treasurer/Secretary, and a co-founder of the American Friends. Uri was truly the linchpin of our organization, the steady hand that guided us through just about everything. He quietly and selflessly shouldered the lion's share of the work that kept our organization running smoothly, often laboring behind the scenes with remarkable dedication and competence. I hope you have a chance to read the heartfelt tributes to Uri inside this newsletter including my own personal tribute.

While Uri's passing represents a tremendous loss for the American Friends, and for me personally, I am pleased to share that **David Taenzer**, Uri's cousin, has graciously stepped forward to assume many of the critical responsibilities that Uri fulfilled with such distinction. David's desire to honor Uri's memory through continued service to our organization is a testament to the Taenzer family's enduring commitment to our shared mission, and we are deeply grateful for his willingness to become our new Treasurer.

With respect to the Museum, you may have also heard the news that **Hanno Loewy**, who has served with distinction as Director of the Museum for more than two decades, has announced his retirement, effective March of next year. Throughout his remarkable tenure, Hanno has provided visionary and deeply committed leadership, guiding both the Museum's innovative programming and its dedicated staff with passion and scholarly rigor. He has worked tirelessly to preserve and honor the memory of the Jewish community that once flourished in Hohenems, ensuring that their stories, traditions, and contributions are never forgotten.

Under Hanno's stewardship, the museum has been transformed into one of Europe's premier cultural destinations, attracting visitors from around the world who come to engage with its thought-provoking exhibitions and programs. His leadership has elevated the institution to international prominence, establishing it as a vital forum for exploring both the rich historical legacy of Jewish culture and the pressing contemporary challenges facing Jewish communities today—from confronting antisemitism to examining questions of identity, belonging, and memory in modern Europe. His departure marks the end of an era for an institution he has shaped so profoundly. Stay tuned for word about his successor.

As this year comes to a close, I am sure that there are many demands on your time and resources. However, I encourage you to take the time to read the excellent articles in this newsletter, which will remind you why the mission of the AFJMH is so critical. I would also ask you to consider making a tax-deductible contribution to the AFJMH (over and above our annual dues) so that we may continue to provide financial support to the Museum.

In closing, I want to thank you so much for continuing to help our organization support the Jewish Museum in Hohenems. I also want to take this opportunity to wish you, your family and friends a healthy and happy holiday season.

All the best,

Claude Rollin

President, American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems

From One Chapter to the Next: A Letter of the Director

DR. HANNO LOEWY

Dear American Friends, dear friends all over the world,

This letter from the Jewish Museum Hohenems comes from my heart and I write these lines with a particular momentum. It's time to wrap up twenty-two years of having the privilege to be the director of one of the most inspiring institutions I ever came across in my life.

Twenty-two years of fulfillment owing so much to you all, the most fabulous museum's community possible.

When I first visited the Jewish Museum in Hohenems in 1994, I realized in an instant that this is a very special place, a place that has not only a history but also a strong meaningful presence. For the previous ten years, I had the chance to visit Hohenems from time to time. Some of the exhibition projects I realized at the Holocaust study center I was working for in Frankfurt were shown in Hohenems. And that also meant collaborating with the devoted but still rather small team in Hohenems, and also experiencing the compassion of an equally devoted crowd of visitors and regulars, something that with this intensity I did not know from my home town in Frankfurt.

Long before the chance appeared on the horizon to become part of this community, the intensity of discourse, the deep sensitivity for the contemporary meaning of Jewish life, the history and culture of a very special cosmopolitan Diaspora of families caught my attention. When in 2003 the museum published the information that Hohenems was seeking a new director, my wife, Astrid, and I realized that this was a once in a lifetime chance to do something meaningful.

In the course of these twenty-two years, we were able to explore together subjects of Jewish history and contemporary culture that raise universal questions, from the female side of god to the birth of global music culture out of the experience of Jewish migration, from the proto-European Jewish experiences and transnational networks to the Jewish pioneers of European democracy and the fight for human rights, from the multi-ethnic – and multi-religious – reality and the tensions of the Israeli society to the great history and heritage of Arab Jews, from the Jewish love story with the Alps to the history of the Hohenems Jewish families. And we were able to send our exhibitions to many other museums in the world, making exhibitions from Hohenems a trademark in the museum world.

We were able to create the genealogical database of Hohenems and the Alpine regions, visited now by hundreds of users every day. We installed new facilities for the ever growing collection of documents and artifacts, photographs, artworks and memorabilia of the Hohenems Jewish community and its Diaspora. Together with partners in the Vorarlberg, we were able to turn the museum into a safe space for real inter-religious and intercultural dialogue beyond empty courtesies. And together with our partners in Switzerland, we are developing a transnational education center on the border, a center that will present and document the history of flight into Switzerland, of refugees and asylum seekers, escape helpers and the Swiss society between 1933 and 1945.

All this was and still is possible, because the museum had faithful friends from the beginning, friends that backed the museum in difficult times, and also motivated its courage to ask painful and open questions and to offer a stage for a multifaceted dialogue about subjects, not being touched elsewhere. The American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems and all the families who celebrate their origins here, coming together at reunions and other occasions, are the strong force providing us the standing we need to cross borders and to extend the perspective beyond the well known.

The Jewish Museum was a hub of public debates about our contemporary society and its reality of migration and transcultural relations. It was this potential developed by its founders and its staff, its friends in the region and on the globe that made the museum special from the opening in April 1991 until today. It was the greatest gift for me to be part of this. By the end of March 2026, it will be time for me to retire. The search process for the next director is on the way and I am very optimistic about a good outcome of this change. We all will do what we can to make this transition smooth and productive.

I very much hope that we will have the chance to stay in touch and to collaborate in one way or the other in the future too. We'll stay in Hohenems anyway. ;-)

All the best,

Hanno



"Jukebox, Jewkbox!" In the Jewish Museum London, 2017
Photo: Jon Holloway



"Everything you always wanted to know about Jews," 2012
Photo: Dietmar Walser



"Everything you always wanted to know about Jews," 2012
Photo: Dietmar Walser



Opening of the New Permanent Exhibition in 2007,
with Felix Jaffe and with Countess Schönborn.
Photo: Darko Todorovic



Opening of the Reunion in 2008, with Louisa Jaffe
Photo: Darko Todorovic

Uri Taenzer and the American Friends: A Legacy of Dedication

Uri Taenzer, a founding member of the American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems, passed away peacefully on April 20th, 2025. Uri served as Secretary and Treasurer of the organization for over 25 years. Everyone who met him remembers him as a man whose generosity and quiet humor was infectious and who gave his time, love and support to all who knew him. His modesty and wisdom moved many people.

Uri reached the age of 86. He is survived by his cherished wife **Cantor Marlena Taenzer**, sister **Ruth Loose**, daughter **Laura Aberant (Kevin)**, granddaughters **Elizabeth** and **Catherine**, niece **Michelle**, many cousins and extended family members, and too many friends and acquaintances to count.

He was born in 1938 in Tel Aviv, ten years before Israel was established as a country, the son of **Fritz** and **Margot Taenzer** and grandson of **Rabbi Aron Tänzer**. The family immigrated to the United States



in the early 1950's settling in Vineland, NJ. Uri then attended Rutgers-Camden where he earned his BS and JD degrees and was in one of the first graduating classes of the law school. After graduating, he relocated to Burlington County where he engaged in the general practice of law for portions of seven decades, and served as a Municipal Court Judge in Willingboro and Burlington Townships in the 1970s.

He was a passionate supporter of many civic and charitable organizations. He was happiest spending time with family, and going to the gym, all while listening to Frank Sinatra or classical music. He will be remembered as a man of great generosity, who gave freely of his time, love, and resources to all who knew him.

The legacy of his grandfather, who maintained throughout his life that Judaism was above all an ethical value, was alive in him. On April 23, Uri was laid to rest at Alliance Cemetery in Norma, New Jersey. The moving funeral service in Cherry Hill was attended by countless friends of his fulfilled life.



In Memory of Uri Taenzer (1938 – 2025)

With Uri's passing, we lost an irreplaceable pillar of our organization and community. While many of us have contributed ideas, financial support, and even attended one or more Hohenems descendants' reunions, Uri was the steady hand that kept our financial foundation secure and our operations running smoothly. As our Treasurer, he didn't just manage the books—he was the backbone of our entire organization.

Year after year, he meticulously tracked every dollar, prepared every financial report, ensured we met every deadline, and navigated the complex requirements that nonprofit organizations face. His dedication went far beyond the technical duties of his role. Uri built relationships with our members, donors, vendors, partners, and volunteers through countless emails, letters and phone calls, becoming the reliable voice and trusted face of our organization.

Together with my father, **Stephan Rollin**, and **Sue Rosenthal Shimer**, Uri was one of the founders of the **American Friends of the Jewish Museum Hohenems (AFJMH)**. From the very beginning, he worked tirelessly to set-up the organization and secure our tax-exempt status, allowing US-based descendants and other supporters of the Jewish Museum in Hohenems to contribute and receive charitable deductions for their donations.

When my father passed away in 2004, Uri called to ask if I would serve as President of the AFJMH. I asked him what the role entailed, and he explained it in a way that gave me confidence—reassuring me that he would be there to guide me and help with any task along the way. And I quickly learned that I

could, in fact, count on Uri's guidance and support whenever I needed it. In short, he made my job easy.

Uri seemed to know everyone connected to our mission, and everyone knew they could count on him for a prompt, thoughtful, and helpful response. He frequently corresponded with members, researched all kinds of issues, answered questions about donations and other matters, as well as maintained regular communications with Hanno Loewy and the staff at the Museum. His institutional knowledge was encyclopedic, his attention to detail impeccable, and his commitment unwavering.

Now, as we sort through his files and try to understand the many threads he kept woven together, we're realizing just how much he quietly accomplished—the systems he built, the relationships he nurtured, and the countless hours he devoted to ensuring our organization could focus on its mission. His legacy is woven into every program we fund, every initiative we launch, and every life we touch. Uri gave us everything, and we will do our best to carry his dedication forward.

At Uri's funeral, I felt the profound love, respect, and admiration so many people had for him. He touched countless lives with his warmth, generosity, and kindness. I miss him deeply but remain grateful for the many years I was fortunate to know him—and for the wisdom and friendship he shared with me over the past 25+ years.

May his memory be a blessing.

—Claude Rollin

Uri Taenzer (1938 – 2025)

Uri will never be forgotten in Hohenems.

Meeting with Uri was always a deeply moving experience - whether it was in Hohenems on one of the many occasions he never missed, when it was possible to do the trip across the ocean, or when I visited Uri and Marlena in New York or New Jersey. There was always a sense of deep affection, of true love in the air. Love between Uri and Marlena, love for his roots in Hohenems and the heritage of his grandfather, who left to us the "*Bible of Hohenems Jewish history*", love for his own family but also for the idea of family as such. And also love for those who take care of the Hohenems heritage, both in the association he helped to bring to life, but also everybody here in Hohenems in the museum, working on the preservation of the memory of this place and the people who made this place so special for centuries.

Uri supported our work by heart, he always had an open ear and an open mind. Exactly what we needed to develop this museum to what it is today.

With his warmth and his openness toward anybody he made countless friends among the people of Hohenems today. The ties between the locals and the descendants grew deeper and deeper in the past 30 years. Uri was one of the role models in the board of the American friends who built bridges - also passing the abyss of past crimes - that others could then walk with ease, giving an example also to us here, when we were crossing borders in our diverse reality of today, dependent on openness and care for each others heritage, beliefs and experiences.

—Hanno Loewy

Words can never properly express what we all owe to Uri.

I will start with the personal. I was always so happy to see him at our Reunions. Uri's smile, his enthusiasm, his ideas- he was such an essential part of those Reunions, indeed, of the diaspora. How we will all miss him at the next Reunion and the times between.

My memories of Uri go way back, beyond those Reunions. The very first memory, indeed contact, was a phone call, in which he and Stefan Rollin asked me to join them in forming the AFJMH. Stefan developed the idea and many vital details- but to make it happen we turned to Uri. Some of his work may sound little, but it was not and it was vital. For example, he secured tax exempt status for AFJMH. That took lots of work and was and remains critically important. Another early task was setting up our bank account- essential and time consuming. All the many things that need to be to make an organization work, he did. We owe so much to Uri.

When there were issues that we needed to discuss, Uri was always there. If he was not sitting by his phone, I heard from him within hours. And his voice was always warm and caring. And he remained involved until the end.

I miss hearing his voice, but am grateful to him for the big achievement of which I am aware- the work in forming the American Friends Jewish Museum Hohenems, and assuring its future. For that and many other things, we all owe him eternal thanks!

—Susan Rosenthal Shimer

News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects

JEWISH ORIENTALIST.

Scholars and Adventurers on the Search of the Self in the Other.

by Hanno Loewy



The next show at the Jewish Museum Hohenems will run from November 16, 2025 to October 4, 2026. It is an exhibition on 'Orientalists' – on self confident "Morgenländer" at the Jewish Museum. This exhibition poses a highly charged question in a thought provoking roundabout way: How does Europe view the 'Orient'? And how do the European Jews?

And how did Jews view themselves in a Europe whose fantasies about the Orient could hardly have been more contradictory, and in which Jews were repeatedly perceived as the fascinatingly frightening incarnation of all these contradictions between closeness and foreignness, between Europe and its imaginary Orient?

In the wake of postcolonial debates, the 'western perspective' of North Africa and the Middle East, of the Arab

and Islamic world, is now under general suspicion of serving imperial and colonial interests. It is all too easy to think of distorted images that served and continue to serve the purposes of power politics and economics, oscillating between romanticism and demonization. Edward Said's justified criticism of 'Orientalism' has now itself become ideology in many cases, at a time when identity politics from the right and left, dominate the political arena – and "indigenouness", and with it newly defined 'racial' privileges, are elevated to a value in themselves, to proof of older rights. Thus, in the name of 'justice,' seemingly "natural" identities

are now being played off against any universalism of human rights. And criticism of the fatal connection between domination and culturalism is quickly suspected of serving only Western hegemony.

But what remains of the former fantasy of the 'West'? In a world in which Europe is at odds with itself between two dictatorships in the West and East, and daily betrays its own cherished values of 'political liberalism,' human rights and social equality. The fact that a Jewish museum, in this completely new complexity, reminds us that the view of the so-called Orient could have had completely different facets that have been lost in the current turmoil has not least to do with our constitutive interest in the ambiguities of this world. Since its opening in 1991, the Jewish Museum Hohenems has repeatedly crossed and questioned boundaries, experimentally dismantling and reassembling identities. The foreign in the familiar and the familiar in the foreign is the area in which a Jewish Museum essentially always operates, at least when it takes its task seriously of negotiating the meaning of everything that is and can be Jewish in our society or is considered Jewish. Against the tide of rampant polarization, the museum has for years been committed to exploring those spaces in which a culture of encounter and mutual recognition unfolds its fragile life. A place where – in the face of terror and extermination – even seemingly inexorable divisions could be called into question.

This applies to Europe's struggle with its 'own other,' with its own origins in Judaism, which has not been done away with by Christianity and Islam, but has only been swallowed up for a long time and thus lies uneasily in the stomach. But this also applies not least to Europe's contact with its repeatedly invoked 'other' on the doorstep, the 'Orient', even if it lies far to the west, like Morocco. And thus, finally, to Europe's own diverse origins in the Orient.

At the beginning of the 19th century, 'Jewish studies' began to look at Judaism itself from a historical perspective, researching its origins: emerging from human experiences and tensions, political conflicts and the wealth of languages and cultural forms of expression of that world which Europe summarized as the 'Orient'. This search for its own origins in North Africa and the Near and Middle

News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

JEWISH ORIENTALIST

East aroused an enormous productivity of curiosity, between a thirst for adventure and an interest in research, and thus contributed decisively – especially in German-speaking countries – to the development of all those new scientific disciplines that continue to study the Orient to this day.

At the same time, it followed a longing to free oneself from the grip of Christianity, whose interpretation of Judaism as its own prehistory dominated European consciousness. Jewish emancipation should no longer mean emancipation into a Christian society; enlightened reform and criticism of religion should be drawn from their own sources. The attempt to inscribe themselves anew and self-determinedly into European history of thought was, of course, not the only motive of those Jewish 'Orientals' who set out for the Orient to secure their share in its interpretation. Jewish scientists, travel writers and archaeologists – and their supporters – also contributed to the imperial and colonial interests of European powers and sought to define themselves as authentic Europeans in this way. Some slipped into the costume of the Oriental to reassure themselves of their own 'whiteness' by enjoying the costume as a charade. Others, on the contrary, tried to merge into their own image of the Oriental, to erase the contradiction between Europe and its imagined 'other,' even to the point of converting to Islam. Even in Palestine, some Jews, in the name of cultural Zionism and the fantasy of a return to their origins, still advocated seeking ways for Jews and the Arab world to coexist in cultural proximity. This was to change radically later on in the name of political archaeology and competing claims to older territorial rights.

At the end of the arc that our exhibition shows, indeed, stands the expulsion and extermination of all of them, whether serious scholars (by now by no means only men) or dilettante adventurers, under the banner of European self-destruction in the name of nationalism, racism and anti-Semitism. One of them, the Munich papyrus researcher and ancient Egyptologist Michael Schnebel, who took his own life in Feldkirch in November 1938 together with his wife Emmy after a failed attempt to flee to Switzerland, now rests in the Jewish cemetery in Hohenems. One of those adventurous, perhaps even supercilious travellers who sought to discover his own Orient – from Turkey to Iran – with alert eyes and insatiable curiosity, Gerald Reitlinger, who came from a Hohenems family, published his travelogue under the idiosyncratic title *A Tower of Skulls*. After experiencing the Second World War as a British soldier, his scientific interest turned to those of whom not even skulls remained. His book *Final Solution* was the first attempt in English (then also translated to German) to provide a comprehensive account of the Holocaust – a subject that never left him.

Beyond these examples, however, the legacy of the Jewish 'Orientalists' has yet to be discovered. Many of their voyages of discovery may lead not only to the past and origins, but also to other possible futures, if one were to allow oneself to entertain the thought.

The fact that this adventurous voyage of discovery into the world of 'Jewish Orientalists' from Central Europe has now led to this exhibition and this accompanying book is due not least to the insistence of our frequent guest curator Felicitas Heimann-Jelinek, who confidently steered this project through all the critical questions to its conclusion, but also to the energetic and thoughtful support of our new in-house curator Dinah Ehrenfreund-Michler.

As exhibition architect, Martin Kohlbauer, assisted by designer Roland Stecher, has prepared a stage for Orientals in a magnificent manner. And we owe Thomas Matt our thanks for the careful and sensitive design of this book.



News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

"SWITZERLAND AS A REFUGE?"

OPENING REMARKS BY HANNO LOEWY
(DIRECTOR OF JEWISH MUSEUM, HOHENEMS)



Thousands of personal stories are waiting to be discovered in Switzerland's archives, in the Federal Archives in Bern as well as in the Archive for Contemporary History in Zurich. Reminders of people who are waiting for someone to finally take an interest in them, in their lives, and in their struggle to remain human. Back then, when thousands of refugees were hoping to find refuge in Switzerland, on a freezing cold March night in 1944, once again two of them crossed the border into Diepoldsau – and ended up in the hospital in Altstätten. Jan Grünberg and Aniela Kornhauser had met

in Innsbruck. They had come there from Poland in 1943, with false names and "Aryan" papers, as one would call that at the time. She worked as a chambermaid, he as a hotel servant – in two different hotels. But in March 1944, the Gestapo began checking all foreign workers in the city. The two knew they were in danger. At night, they took the train to Dornbirn, then to Hohenems, climbed over the barbed wire on the Old Rhine shortly before midnight, swam across the New Rhine, and stumbled barefoot across frozen fields to the Weilerhütte near Widnau. There they were arrested and, with frostbitten feet, open and closed blood blisters, and lower legs torn by barbed wire, were sent to the hospital. And they were allowed to stay.

The authorities considered "deportation" to be "currently inadvisable," as stated in so many files. Instead, the permanent threat of deportation or even imprisonment was generally considered advisable if someone committed an offense: for example, taking up work without authorization (and it was almost always not authorized), or entering into a romantic relationship with a local (always not authorized), or engaging in any political activity (even if it was just smuggling resistance literature printed in Switzerland into the German Reich).

The exhibition "Switzerland as a refuge? Escape in the Rhine Valley" invites visitors to follow the footsteps of these "illegals," people who tried to take control of their own lives, who overcame their fears—only to be caught up in

them again, often enough, in Switzerland. People who were not just victims, but saved some of their agency. And we invite you to a double change of perspective, to a view from Switzerland to the German Reich, from a democracy that was still functioning to a certain extent (albeit with restrictions at the time) to people escaping a danger whose ultimate consequences (total annihilation) were still unimaginable in 1933 or 1938.

They escaped from political persecution, from discrimination, from the destruction of their economic existence, and then to save their bare lives. But also to escape forced labor, to escape service in a criminal army, or even to be able to fight against the Nazis.

And at the same time, looking at a Swiss society with the eyes of the refugees, a society in which racism and anti-Semitism were part of everyday life, not least when it came to people who had fled to the Swiss authorities to escape certain death. They were considered a threat to Swiss culture, Swiss neutrality, the Swiss labor market, and the Swiss social system, even though all the costs they were causing had to be covered by refugee aid organizations, many of which were Jewish. Most of them were what you might call "ordinary people." They had unspectacular jobs; they were plumbers and fitters, bakers, tailors and butchers, window dressers, grocers, and taxi drivers. They were the majority of Viennese Jews who, lacking a Nobel Prize or similar accolade, had rarely made it into a Jewish or other museum.

And their families came mostly from Eastern Europe, before, during, or after World War I, having already experienced a never ending war, anti-Semitic persecution, escape, and poverty-driven migration. They had little to lose. And after the Swiss introduction of visa requirements in March 1938, and especially after the border was closed on August 18, 1938, the only way for them to enter Switzerland was illegally. The internal reports the Swiss authorities about them are full of racist and anti-Semitic invective – and derogatory remarks about their anxiety and illnesses, which nobody really wanted to take seriously:

About E.B. it says: "German Jewish emigrant. Communist. Under the jurisdiction of the Federal Prosecutor's Office. Expelled by the Federal Council. Nervous stomach problems." About R.P.: "German Jewish emigrant. Neurasthenic. Psychopath," and about the G.-S. family: "German Jewish emigrants. Otherwise make a decent impression." A.H. is succinctly described as "Jewish emigrant. Harmless." Otherwise, the verdict "neurasthenic," "neurotic," "or even" slightly crazy "comes up again and again. I.L., on the other hand, is dismissed as "has various ailments. Partially malingering." It doesn't take much imagination to figure out where so many nervous disorders come from. Most of them don't know whether their parents or relatives are still alive. Often enough, they never hear from them again.



News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

"SWITZERLAND AS A REFUGE?"

But it gets even blunter: in such reports from internment camps, J.S. is described as a "real Polish vagabond," and J.M. as "a Jewish slacker who, like many of his fellow believers, needs a certain amount of time before he realizes that one has to work." O.K. is also considered a malingerer. In March 1947 the immigration police noted, "Don't let up now! K. deserves no leniency." In May he died in a refugee camp near Lugano, of angina pectoris, that devilish heart disease that causes severe anxiety. The naturalization of S.P., who was born in Zurich, is rejected on the following grounds: "Household residents even say that there is a real Jewish-Polish disorder in S.'s household. Although his wife seems to be making an effort to climb up to our cultural level, a satisfactory result is still a long way off." And the St. Gallen immigration police did not hold back either. Adolf Werner was allowed to stay in Switzerland because Paul Grüninger and Sidney Dreyfuss, the head of the St. Gallen refugee aid organization, backdated his border crossing to before August 18, 1938. This offense provided the pretext for Grüninger's dismissal and conviction in 1939. Werner was a man "who could adapt to any advantageous situation with genuine Jewish sophistication (Werner was undoubtedly of Semitic descent) and who would be capable of all sorts of things."

The successful rehabilitation of Paul Grüninger in the 1990s, followed by several other less prominent escape helpers, changed the political culture of the country, broke taboos, and made openness to history possible. Stefan Keller and Jörg Krummenacher played a decisive role in this with their research and books. They were also the first to listen to the refugees. The history of escape and refugees, of those who helped them escape and of Swiss society needs this multi-faceted, transnational perspective, but also the different perspectives of those involved. Together with our Swiss friends, we have been working for years to highlight the reality of escape, its history and its relevance, which is evident in every fate and every document. In 2022, we were able to open a 100-kilometer audio trail on the subject together with 25 communities on both sides of the Rhine. Soon after, the canton approached us to ask if we wanted to work together to set up an education center for exhibition, workshops and documentation on this topic in Diepoldsau on the Old Rhine, as part of the planned Swiss memorial for the victims of Nazism. With the Swiss Memorial



Network Association, the project has now officially started and will keep us busy for many years to come.

And no sooner had we embarked on this path when our colleagues at the Museum Prestegg, led by Sonja Arnold and no doubt encouraged by Christa Köppel, took us by surprise with their proposal to work together on this exhibition. We are deeply grateful to them for this, as there could hardly be a better way to anchor this existential issue in the region in a new and broad-based way.

Jan Grünberg and Aniela Kornhauser, like many others, have given up on their dream of being allowed to stay in Switzerland. In 1946, Jan Grünberg, an experienced engineer, desperately asked to be allowed to take a job. But either the authorities refused to grant him a work permit, or companies did not want to hire refugees because they did not know how long they would be allowed to keep them. So the couple, who were soon to be married, looked for a way to emigrate. Australia was discussed – and in the end, they ended up with Bolivia. After all, you can't choose where you get a visa from. But before they left, the completely penniless couple received a bill from the

immigration authorities: 43 daily rates of 3 Swiss francs for accommodation in the reception camp, 11 francs for the ambulance to Altstätten and 25 francs for the police operation, and of course more for the hospital stay and medical examinations.

At the end of October 1947, the two boarded the ship in Genoa that took them to South America. The bill remains unpaid.

In many ways, today's world resembles that past more than we could have imagined for many years. And yet it is completely different. Back then, fascist Europe had to be liberated from outside. Today, the most dangerous dictators sit in Washington and Moscow. And it is Europe that must defend democracy, working together and not playing off each other. I say this quite deliberately in Switzerland, too. But that is a topic for another exhibition, which we have already created at the Jewish Museum in Hohenems and sent on tour: "The Last Europeans." Those, whom – as Walter Benjamin remarked shortly before his suicide – "we do not want to be."

Eighty years ago as of yesterday, World War II came to an end with the American occupation of Japan. It is a day, in this exhibition too, that raises many questions.

"SAVING SWITZERLAND? FLIGHT IN THE RHINE VALLEY"

BY BARBARA THIMM, PROJECT LEAD

(JEWISH MUSEUM HOHENEMS/ SWISS MEMORIAL ST. GALLEN PROJECT)

Insight into the exhibition concept of the exhibition

"Saving Switzerland? Flight in the Rhine Valley" at Museum Prestegg Altstätten (31.8.2025 – 27.7.2027)

Speech at the opening session on 2025, August 31st

Every exhibition is a production. You will decide whether we have succeeded. Exhibition curators choose a narrative thread, usually with a few side stories, but there is a main narrative.

It was obvious to choose the Swiss perspective, a country that became a destination for many people fleeing persecution in the 1930s for specific reasons, and because it is the location where this exhibition is being shown.

Not just anywhere in Switzerland, but here in the Rhine Valley, which saw a particularly large influx of people in the summer of 1938 and the spring of

1945. But limiting ourselves to this perspective would have meant not being able to tell the story of the refugees' experiences, but only how Switzerland and its population reacted to their arrival.

Choosing the perspective of the regime, at that time Nazi Germany and the "Ostmark" (as Austria was called from 1938 as part of the German Reich) as the sole perspective – which had the audacity to decide within its sphere of influence who was allowed to live on this earth and who was not – was out of the question.

News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

"SAVING SWITZERLAND? FLIGHT IN THE RHINE VALLEY"

So, we decided to focus our exhibition on 35 biographies: individuals, families, married couples, groups who tried to resist persecution by fleeing and people who came into contact with the refugees, either because they were responsible for them 'officially', because they were geographically close, because they wanted to profit or because they wanted to help.

And we tell these stories through gruesome, touching, insightful, surprising exhibits – here is just a small selection:

- The last publication in 1938 by PHILO, a Jewish publishing house in Berlin, before it had to close: a 'Handbook for Jewish Emigration,' which summarizes under the heading "Switzerland": Few opportunities.
- A plan – presumably from Adolf Eichmann's Vienna office – from the summer of 1939, which euphemistically calls itself 'Jewish Emigration from the Ostmark' and meticulously 'celebrates' the reduced numbers of Jewish communities in Austria since 1938.
- Six typed pages from the office of Saly Mayer (at that time president of the Swiss Federation of Jewish Communities), which describe in shorthand style what happened between June and November 1938 at the borders, especially in the Rhine Valley, and what decisions they faced.
- The Prestegg Museum was entrusted with a ring from the Theresienstadt ghetto, which Fritz Spitzer from Vienna had asked to make for herself in exchange for a piece of bread and which she not only brought with her to the Hadwig School building in St. Gall in February 1945, but which also meant a great deal to her for the rest of her life.
- We display a clay mask by Hilda Monte, which she made in Switzerland before venturing across the border again shortly before the end of the war to help promote the political reconstruction of Europe. She did not survive this mission.
- We can show the book in which Paul Grüninger wrote down his story for the 1951 class reunion, which inspired a former classmate to publish it in the newspaper. You know the rest of the story of his late rehabilitation.

And so on...

At the edges of the exhibition, we provide a brief and, unfortunately, only summary account of the flight from all the other borders of Switzerland: from Lake Constance, from Schaffhausen and Basel, from the Jura, Valais, Vaud, from Geneva,

from Ticino and Misoix, from Graubünden. All these regions deserve their own exhibitions. Why shouldn't such exhibitions be created in the coming years?

But how can we tell the stories of the people who never made it to Switzerland?

Who never even set out on their journey because they knew the border was closed and saw no chance of obtaining a visa?

Because they had already been sent away at a Swiss consulate?

Or because they made it to the border and were turned away there?

These people were generally not registered anywhere, and their numbers are unknown.

If they were Jewish, or categorized as such by the Nazis, or belonged to one of the other persecuted groups, many of them did not survive. Our helpless attempt to bring them into the picture is to tell the fate of their family members in the selected biographies of the refugees.

But why an exhibition on this topic now?

Hardly any of those involved at the time are still alive. Yes, there is another reason: the Second World War ended 80 years ago.

Like all societies in Europe, Switzerland has a varied history of remembering and not remembering its relationship with the German Reich and Italian fascism, and this continues today. The final report of the Independent Commission of Experts 'Switzerland, National Socialism and the Second World War', also known as the Bergier report, was published in 2002, 23 years ago.

Influential voices have not fallen silent, demanding a public sign that Switzerland, as a state, should address the issues that are particularly close to people's hearts:

- Swiss citizens were persecuted by the German Reich and lost their lives.
- Switzerland continued to do business with the German Reich and Italy and tried not to 'provoke' these regimes.
- For the most part and for a very long time, Switzerland kept its borders closed to refugees, even if their lives were in danger – especially if they were Jewish.
- Not only did it keep its borders closed to these refugees, it also handed people over to the German border guards and the Gestapo.

No, Auschwitz was not in Switzerland, but there were paths leading from Switzerland to Auschwitz.

Two years ago, two identical motions were tabled in the Council of States and the National Council and were unanimously approved: the federal government is promoting the creation of a Swiss memorial to the victims of National Socialism in two locations: in Bern, near the Bundeshaus, the Parliament, and – as has now been decided – in Diepoldsau, here in the Rhine Valley. The desired location here is the customs house on the border, which belonged already to the customs at that time. This is the best place to tell the story of attempts to flee to Switzerland between 1933 and 1945, not least because it belonged to the district served by police chief inspector Paul Grüninger.

For us – the Jewish Museum Hohenems, which was invited to help shape this cross-border project – this exhibition, with its long duration, is a learning station on the way to the 'Flight Information Centre'.

A historical exhibition on the subject of flight is never just historical – when the subject of flight is so explosive and globally relevant. We kindly ask you to let us know what this exhibition means to you.

When looking at the documents and reports, I was repeatedly reminded – whether I wanted to or not – of today and not just of Switzerland: the fear of 'foreign infiltration'; the basic attitude of defensiveness; the ban on refugees working; the exhausting bureaucratic treatment of people; the delaying tactics regarding whether and when secure status will be granted; and the criminalization of those who want to help.

The Paul Grüninger Foundation Award went to the crew of the "Juventa", a rescue ship, in 2019 for rescuing approximately 14,000 people in the Mediterranean. At that point, the ship of the NGO "Jugend rettet" (translates: Youth saves) had already been docked in Italy for two years because it had been seized as a preventive measure on suspicion of aiding illegal immigration, and members of the crew were on trial. In 2024, seven long years later, all charges were dropped! The (now not so young) crew, enriched by many unnecessary? Frustrating? Unsupportive experiences, is allowed to set sail again.

What would the young women from the girls' school in Rorschach, who had the courage to complain to the Federal Council in 1942 about the rejection of refugees at the border and who experienced intimidation instead of encouragement, and the activists from 'Jugend rettet' would have to say to each other and to us?

Thank you for your interest in our exhibition and for your attention!

News from the Museum: Exhibitions and Projects (Cont'd)

“ES WERDEN LEBEN DEINE TODTEN”: RESTORATION OF THE JEWISH CEMETERY

BY RAPHAEL EINETTER, MA

Twenty-five years ago, on October 24, 2000, representatives of the governments of Austria and the United States of America signed an agreement in Vienna on the “Austrian Fund for Reconciliation, Peace, and Cooperation (Reconciliation Fund)”. This was one of the last steps before the so-called “Washington Agreement” entered into effect in the following June.

The agreement comprised ten paragraphs regulating compensation and restitution for victims of National Socialism: Paragraph 8 contained funding for the restoration and preservation of Jewish cemeteries in Austria.

As a result, around 50 restoration projects were carried out at 13 Jewish cemeteries between 2010 and 2020 – including as one of the earliest, the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems.

Even though gravestones had already been restored and preservation measures had been carried out at the heritage-protected site in Hohenems in previous years, these additional funds made a significant difference. Christine and Patrick Jürgens, who were commissioned to carry out the gravestone restoration as well as the architects Ada and Reinhard Rinderer, who were responsible for planning the whole project, reported on their work in the book on the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems, published in 2024. These articles are now available in translated form in this newsletter issue.

The series will be continued in the next editions.

—Raphael Einetter



Restoration of gravestones at the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems

In 2010, we carried out restoration work for the first time at the Jewish Cemetery on the Rosenthal family tomb (row 8, grave 19). In 2012, a systematic assessment of the condition of all tombs was carried out by the Federal Monuments Office of Vorarlberg (Mr. Georg Mack) and the architectural firm Rinderer Architekten (Mr. Reinhard Rinderer). Based on these assessments, we have been able to restore more than 60 particularly endangered gravestones in recent years.

Problematic Stone: Rorschach sandstone

The Jewish Cemetery contains gravestones made from many different types of natural stone. The more recent gravestones, made from hard stone and mainly located in rows 1 to 8, date from the 19th and 20th centuries and are hardly affected by weathering. In these areas, foundation work was mainly necessary due to doubts about the stability of the stones. In contrast, the older gravestones, which until the 19th century were made almost exclusively from Rorschach sandstone, are heavily weathered and endangered.

Rorschach sandstone belongs to the molasse sandstones, which were formed by the deposition and solidification of erosion debris and various minerals in the so-called Molasse Basin north of the Alps. There are numerous varieties of molasse sandstones, which have very different properties, although they may appear very similar. The Jewish Cemetery primarily used fine-grained, gray-green Rorschach sandstone. It is named after its quarry in Staad near Rorschach in Switzerland, where it has been quarried for over 600 years and is used in parts of Switzerland, Austria, and Germany.

Rorschach sandstone is relatively susceptible to weathering. This is partly due to its clay content, which expands and contracts with fluctuations in humidity, loosening the structure of the stone over time, and partly due to its carbonate content, which is relatively easily soluble and can be converted into gypsum under the influence of weathering. The resulting gypsum further weakens the structure of the stone. Typical damage patterns include shell formation, flaking, and sanding.

The older gravestones made of Rorschach sandstone, usually carved from a single block, originally had no foundation or were set deep in the ground. In addition to rainfall, they are also exposed to rising damp. Furthermore, the stones were generally erected perpendicular to the bedding planes, which increases water absorption. The most severe damage usually occurs approximately 10 to 20 cm above the ground, where a drying zone forms. In this area, the sandstone is exposed to the greatest mechanical stress due to repeated swelling and shrinkage processes as well as salt crystallization. Once the loosening has advanced far enough, the gravestone typically breaks apart.

In the past, broken gravestones were often re-erected. The lower fragment remained in the ground, while the upper fragment was set up in front of or behind it and encased in concrete. The fragments were not joined together, which explains the reduced height of many gravestones. This procedure was sometimes carried out more than once, so that only the upper third remains visible today.

Restoration of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems (Cont'd)



Restorer Patrick Jürgens in his workshop, 2021



Restorer Patrick Jürgens in his workshop, 2021



Soaking a gravestone, 2021

Restoration of the sandstones

The restoration of the severely endangered gravestones was carried out after securing and dismantling them for transport to our restoration workshop, as sustainable restoration was not possible on site for various reasons. The steep terrain poses a major problem, and it is also difficult to dry the gravestones properly before restoration. In addition, it was decided that the gravestones should be given new concrete foundations to ensure their long-term stability and minimize moisture ingress from the ground.

In the restoration workshop, the gravestones and fragments were first carefully cleaned. The main task was to remove dense layers of moss and lichen, and in some cases salt deposits and mortar residues from previous restoration work. Depending on the condition of each stone, hot and cold water jet devices were used for cleaning, and special sandblasting tools were employed for particularly stubborn crusts. After a drying period of about four to six weeks, the actual restoration work could begin.

All gravestones and fragments were impregnated with silicic acid ester. During curing, silicic acid ester forms silicon dioxide (quartz), which is the stone's natural binding agent. One advantage of silicic acid ester is that no harmful by-products are formed during quartz formation, since the solvent ethanol evaporates completely, as does the water released during curing.

Shells and fragments were rejoined using mineral adhesives and, in some cases, epoxy resin. Large shells and fragments were additionally connected with stainless steel dowels. Silicic acid ester-based mortar was used to fill cracks and cavities, which was injected using syringes and cannulas. Alternatively, Syton was used as a binding agent, which also forms silicon oxide, but is water-based and hardens physically through drying.

Larger mortar repairs were carried out mainly in the area of the base surfaces, where necessary for re-erection of the gravestones. Otherwise, no reconstructions were made—only crack fillings and edge beveling required for conservation purposes.

—Christine & Patrick Jürgens, Jürgens Restoration, Sigmarszell, Germany

Report on the restoration work at the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems

Despite ongoing restoration and maintenance measures, time has inevitably left its mark on the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems. However, the establishment of the *Fund for the Restoration of Jewish Cemeteries in Austria* as well as an amendment to the National Fund Act,¹ has recently made it possible to plan and carry out urgently needed repairs. In 2012, the *Federal Monuments Office* began surveying the condition of all structures. The results concerning the plasterwork and wall coverings, including decorative stones on the cemetery wall, were sobering, as the assessment revealed total deterioration, necessitating extensive renovation work. In addition, the gravestones were divided into categories:

- 1 - Stable and in good condition for at least 10 years
- 2 - Minor restoration necessary or stability deficient
- 3 - Complete restoration necessary
- 3+ - The gravestone is still partially preserved, barely legible, possibly still restorable
- X - 'Loss'

Building on this foundation, comprehensive documentation for the upcoming restoration work was compiled in accordance with the detailed guidelines for the allocation of Funds for the restoration of Jewish cemeteries in Austria and submitted to the National Fund as a complete project in January 2013. This enabled the implementation of the first sub-projects to begin in 2014.

Surveying work

The graves at the Jewish cemetery in Hohenems, as well as the enclosure wall and entrance hall, were surveyed using conventional measurement methods. At least two measuring points were recorded for each grave, which were then used to determine its position on the site plan. The buildings were recorded in linear form and also documented on the plan. A theodolite was used for the measurements. The accuracy of each measured point was within the sub-centimeter range and the measurements were carried out in accordance with the state surveying system.

During this work, significant deviations were discovered compared to the 1993 documentation available at the time. As the Jewish Cemetery is located on a slope prone to landslides, the newly determined positions of the individual graves, the cemetery wall, and the entrance hall

¹ NR: GP XXIV IA 1313/A AB 990 S. 83. BR: AB 8409 S. 790.

Restoration of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems (Cont'd)

now serve as important evidence of the existing structure.

Historical records and the gravestone register dated May 1, 1904,² show a difference of around 100 graves compared to the current inventory. Although there have been occasional burials in recent decades, it can be assumed that some gravestones have either sunk or been lost over the centuries. This is particularly evident in the apparently empty areas in the oldest sections of the cemetery, which cannot be regarded as vacant burial plots. To ensure the peace of the graves, these areas were examined using non-destructive geophysical prospecting methods. The company that carried out the work, Posselt & Zickgraf Prospektionen, described this method as follows:

“Due to the challenging topographical conditions, a combination of ground-penetrating radar and magnetometer prospecting was carried out. Ground-penetrating radar is generally well-suited to detecting solid stone structures, such as foundations or even overturned gravestones. In most cases, it can also detect former paved paths and, under certain circumstances, filled-in planting pits. Under favorable geological/soil conditions, this method provides high spatial resolution and information on the depth of the structures, making it suitable for small survey areas. Magnetometer prospecting, on the other hand, is particularly suitable for detecting disturbed soil features (filled pits, trenches). In this way, it may be possible to detect burial pits and possibly also unpaved paths. Particularly given the relatively small measurement area, the combined method offers the possibility of investigating different physical parameters of the subsoil to obtain more comprehensive information about underground structures.”³

The final report on the measurements taken in the summer of 2014 provided evidence of possible, no longer visible graves or gravestones as well as former paths or stairs, and an earlier cemetery wall. Positive and negative measurements and various anomalies often coincided with existing or presumed rows of graves, suggesting former burial sites.

Although it was not possible to draw definitive conclusions regarding the density of burial and the exact locations of lost graves, the probable areas were narrowed down considerably. Based on these findings, archaeological investigations of the upper soil layers would now be necessary to confirm the existence of suspected graves.

However, this was not carried out during the project period. Instead, and in consultation with the Federal Monuments Office, selected gravestones were restored according to their urgency, following the same procedures as in previous years. For each gravestone, a detailed restoration plan was drawn up, specifying the materials required and the methods of treatment. The Jürgens Restoration Workshop reported the following regarding the general situation:

“In particular, the gravestones made of Rorschach sandstone, which are usually monolithic, have no or only inadequate foundations and are simply set into the ground. They are therefore almost permanently damp and exhibit the typical flaking damage of Rorschach sandstone. This flaking is exacerbated by the stones being placed ‘on a split’ (vertical aligned bedding planes). The location of the cemetery and the limited sunlight also prevent the gravestones from drying out. The most severe damage usually occurs approximately 10 to 20 cm above the ground, in a drying zone where the sandstone is exposed to the greatest mechanical stress from repeated swelling and shrinking processes. Many of the damage processes occur unnoticed below ground or are concealed by dense biological growth. Even gravestones that appear to be undamaged can break suddenly and without warning.”⁴

Cemetery wall

The western cemetery wall, around 45 meters long, was probably re-plastered in the 1960s, using a cement-based plaster that was extremely hard and impermeable. Over the years, cracks, water ingress, progressive moisture penetration, and freeze-thaw cycles led to extensive damage along the entire wall. This situation, combined with other structural issues, posed a significant risk for the repair of the cemetery wall. As the extent of the required measures could not initially be determined, it was decided to carry out a sample restoration on a defined section of the wall.

However, when the plaster was removed, stones in the upper half of the wall came loose, causing a partial collapse. The cause was identified as damp jointing material. Once dried, the now unplastered natural stone wall showed varying structural conditions. While the lower section, built with yellowish mortar, regained full strength up to a height of about 1.20 meters, the upper section had to be dismantled and

rebuilt. The sample section was then re-plastered with appropriate materials, and the original wall copings were replaced with accurate replicas made from precast concrete elements.

Following the successful completion of this pilot restoration, the knowledge gained was applied to the restoration of the remaining cemetery wall. The most important restoration work was completed in time for the 400th anniversary of the Jewish Cemetery, celebrated in 2017. In cooperation with the City of Hohenems, the forecourt and parking area were also renovated and redesigned. After these celebrations, the focus returned to the restoration of the gravestones.

Financing

The Association for the Maintenance of the Jewish Cemetery in Hohenems is fully aware of its responsibilities and obligations to safeguard cultural heritage and ensures the ongoing preservation of this important site through continuous maintenance and repair. To date, the costs incurred have been covered partly by private sponsors and partly from the association's own funds, but the work would not have been possible without the generous support of the project partners: the Fund for the Restoration of Jewish Cemeteries in Austria, the State of Vorarlberg, the City of Hohenems, and the Federal Monuments Office.

As architects, initially in a planning role and later in an advisory capacity, we also consider ourselves among these project partners. Our work began in 2012 with the initial survey, and from 2015 onward, it evolved into a personal commitment that continues to this day.

In the coming years, it is important to establish a regular program that will allow us to continue the systematic restoration of the 370 gravestones. Furthermore, we hope that the comprehensive database and the results of the detailed surveying work will be scientifically evaluated in the future. This will once again require strong collaborative partnerships.

We look back with gratitude and look forward to continuing to provide expert advice to the Hohenems Jewish Cemetery Cultural Heritage Preservation Project.

—Ada & Reinhard Rinderer, Rinderer Architects, Dornbirn, Austria

² Aron Tänzer, Die Geschichte der Juden in Hohenems und im übrigen Vorarlberg. Meran 1905, S. 396ff.

³ PZP Posselt & Zickgraf Prospektionen GbR – Büro Marburg, Archäologisch-geophysikalische Prospektionen für Denkmalpflege und Forschung. 2013

⁴ Restaurierungswerkstatt Jürgens, 88138 Sigmarzell, Deutschland - Dokumentation zu Restaurierungsarbeiten an 8 Grabsteinen auf dem Israelitischen Friedhof in A – 6845 Hohenems 2014.



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